

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN □ PAXTON □ PRINCETON □ RUTLAND □ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1356

Monday, January 11, 2021
7:00 PM

MEETING CONDUCTED REMOTELY, VIA GOOGLE MEET

Wachusett Regional School District Committee

Megan Weeks, Chair	Linda Long-Bellil
Michael Dennis, Vice-chair	Kenneth Mills
Melissa Ayala	Karl Ottmar
Krista Bennett	Michael Pantos, Jr.
Scott Brown	Deidre Shapiro
Maleah Gustafson (7:11 PM)	Asima Silva (7:04 PM)
Sherrie Haber	Christina Smith (7:07 PM)
Robert Imber	Jeffrey Sullivan
Laura Kirshenbaum	Kelly Williamson
Matthew Lavoie	Linda Woodland

Committee Members Absent:

Benjamin Mitchel	Adam Young
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Administration Present:

Darryll McCall, Superintendent of Schools
Robert Berlo, Deputy Superintendent
Jeff Carlson, Director of Human Resources
Daniel Deedy, Director of Business and Finance
Brendan Keenan, Director of Social Emotional Learning
Christine Smith, Administrator of Special Education
Barry Sclar, Supervisor of Information Technology
Rebecca Petersen, Executive Secretary to the Superintendent

Student Representatives Present:

Kenichi Gomi	Kathryn Mangus
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Others:

Natalie Dellecese

Chair Weeks called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Chair Weeks announced the meeting was being conducted remotely, via Google Meet, and was being broadcast live on Channel 194 and holdentv.com. Members of the public could access the meeting via YouTube. Chair Weeks explained that a new method for members of the public to

submit comments for Public Hearing has been implemented, and she will read the several comments submitted.

Chair Weeks explained that Agenda Item I, Executive Session, will be passed over.

- I. Executive session to discuss strategy for contract negotiations with bargaining units (Teamsters Union Local 170 (paraprofessionals), SEIU Local 888 (ABA PAs), and Wachusett Administrators Association); to discuss potential litigation; and to report on progress of negotiations with the Wachusett Regional Education Association, Inc. (WREA) on 2020-2021 school reopening, as the Chair deems discussions in public session would have an adverse effect on the District's bargaining position, to return to public session.

Passed over.

- II. Recommendations Requiring Action by the School Committee

Motion: Upon the recommendation of the Legal Affairs Subcommittee, the WRSDC exercises the two (2) option years of the existing home to school bus contract with AA Transportation as delineated in the current contract.

Deferred

Motion: Upon the recommendation of the Legal Affairs Subcommittee, the WRSDC award a three (3) year contract with AA Transportation for Special Education In-District Transportation effective July 1, 2021.

Deferred

Motion: Upon the recommendation of the Legal Affairs Subcommittee, the WRSDC accept the settlement agreement between AA Transportation and the WRSD, as written.

Deferred

- III. Public Hearing

Chair Weeks read what member of the public submitted for Public Hearing (attachment 1):

Erik Greenwell, 10 Maple Street, Sterling

Yuet Tai, 51 Lexington Circle, Holden

Rachael Catlow, 34 Beaman Road, Princeton

Angel Squier, 6 Cider Mill Lane, Princeton

Kristine Baez, 109 Autumn Circle, Holden

Stacia Hemphill, 20 Birch Drive, Sterling

Erin Pickett, 361 Chapel Street, Holden

Alison Spar, 30 Sandy Ridge Road, Sterling

Jennifer Kremer, 151 Nola Drive, Holden

Sue Stowe, 154 Blair Drive, Holden

Wendy Sanders, 12 Malvern Drive, Sterling

Sandra Taubert, 8 John Dee Road, Sterling

Karen Valcarce, 17 East Park Road, Sterling

Alison Ludden, 150 Nola Drive, Holden

Deanna Homoliski, 277 Quinapoxet Street, Holden

Kristine Turner, 469 Shrewsbury Street, Holden

Julie Hurley, 444 Marshall Street, Paxton

William Lahey, 166 Bullard Street, Holden

Melissa Martin, 310 Marshall Street, Paxton

Jeannette and Joe Appel, 236 Newell Road, Holden

Elizabeth Bennett, 9 Osgood Avenue, Holden

Mellyn Shurtleff, 107 North Row Road, Sterling

Debbie Jackson, Autumn Circle, Holden

Gary Hreschuk, 126 Jennifer Drive, Holden

Jean Gough, Holbrook Lane, Paxton

Allison Borging, 5 Arline Drive, Rutland

Erin Knowlton, 235 Mirick Road, Princeton

Barry Dellecese, 28 Patriot Way, Holden

Kristin Palko, 117 Wachusett Street, Holden

Christine Penzone, 92 Jamieson Road, Holden

Tom Rosoff, 67 Prospect Street, Rutland

Shannon Laptewicz, 482 Wachusett Street, Holden

Mary Shepherd, 1320 Wachusett Street, Holden

- Student Opportunity Act (SOA) – Public comment/Stakeholders' Input

No members of the public had comments or input regarding the Student Opportunity Act and the District's plan for use of these potential funds. Superintendent McCall will submit the District's submission by the January 15, 2021 deadline.

IV. Chair's Opening Remarks

Chair Weeks explained that school reopening is not on the agenda for this meeting, so it will not be addressed or acted upon at this meeting. Chair Weeks did reference the vote of November 17, 2020 about implementing hybrid no sooner than January 19, 2021, explaining that vote does not need to be revoked.

WRSD COVID Community Task Force Update

Chair Weeks welcomed Natalie Dellecese to the meeting, and she projected the PowerPoint created by the WRSD COVID Community Task Force (attachment 2). Ms. Dellecese addressed the Committee and spoke to the information and data included in the slideshow. Chair Weeks thanked Ms. Dellecese for attending the meeting, and Ms. Dellecese departed the meeting.

V. Student Representatives (K. Gomi, K. Mangus)

Student Representative Mangus reported that sports have started, which is beneficial for student social emotional health.

Student Representative Mangus make a presentation on MCAS Survey Results. Student Mangus spoke to the information, explaining that the presentation has been updated since she presented it to the Management Subcommittee. At the conclusion of the presentation, members were given the opportunity to thank Student Representative Mangus.

VI. Superintendent's Report

A. Discussion of Report

Superintendent McCall opened his remarks, speaking to Student Representative Mangus' presentation, as well as information he has learned from the state about MCAS being administered this school year.

Transition to Hybrid Planning Update was projected, and Superintendent McCall walked through the information (attachment 3). Superintendent McCall gave a very detailed explanation of the information in the presentation, and further explained that the plan to implement hybrid on January 19, 2021 is still the direction the District is moving.

Chair Weeks opened the meeting to questions and comments from members.

Comments were made about “pool testing.”

Member Lavoie asked Superintendent McCall for clarification about hybrid being implemented on January 19th, and Superintendent McCall explained that the current plan is to have all students who have opted for hybrid to be back in school, under the hybrid model, on January 19, 2021. At Member Long-Bellil’s inquiry, Superintendent McCall spoke about the cohorts and that students in Cohort A and Cohort B will transition to hybrid on January 19th, with Cohort A students being in-person Mondays and Tuesdays, Cohort B students being in-person Thursdays and Fridays, and Wednesdays being remote for both Cohort A and Cohort B.

Member Mills asked about learning plans for students who will be fully remote, as well as remote days for the two cohorts, and he requested this information be provided as soon as possible, hopefully before implementation of hybrid on January 19th. Member Mills also asked about staff being in schools on Wednesday afternoons.

Chair Weeks asked that members email their requests for information to her, and she will share with Superintendent McCall to address.

Member Ottmar asked what the District’s plan is to address when staffing is impacted due to teachers/others having to quarantine. Superintendent McCall acknowledged these sorts of situations will arise, but may need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis and “on the fly.” Superintendent McCall explained providing a safe environment for students and staff is essential and will be a top priority.

Member Pantos mentioned the importance of committing to the date of implementation of hybrid. Member Pantos asked Superintendent McCall how much time will be provided to parents if there is a need to transition from hybrid to remote due to incidences in a school. Superintendent McCall explained it might be a very close call, similar to when snow days are called. Member Pantos had additional questions about CO2 levels and readings, a flow chart to follow when exposure is questioned or known. Member Pantos lastly asked that District administration be mindful of closing individual classrooms/schools if needed, rather than closing the entire District or transitioning back to remote.

Member Silva expressed concern about fully remote students and how they will be taught, and she also asked about teachers being vaccinated. Deputy Superintendent

Berlo listed some of the online technology brought onboard during the period of remote.

Member Smith voiced her concerns about several items related to the reopening of schools, for example sufficient social distancing in classrooms.

Member Williamson thanked the Superintendent for the presentation. She spoke about the need to be patient with initial implementation of hybrid, acknowledging there will be some issues as this begins, including teachers teaching in-person students and students who will remain remote. She suggested another survey be conducted after a fashion, to get input and feedback from all stakeholders.

Member Woodland asked about pool testing, which Superintendent McCall spoke to, explaining this is a very new rollout by the state.

Member Ayala stressed the need for the message to be sent to parents asking them to be flexible as hybrid gets implemented and if there is a need to transition back to remote, flexibility needs to be paramount.

Member Brown understands there is anxiety being experienced by some about implementation to hybrid, and he stressed the importance of clear and constant communication between the schools and parents.

Member Dennis would like to second Member Mills' request to see learning plans for remote students.

Member Gustafson feels a walk-through video of the individual schools would be beneficial for students returning to school, to show them what they will be returning to. She also asked what the plan would be "when" the transition to remote happens, which Superintendent McCall confirmed the District would hope to keep the higher needs students in-person, program students as well as higher needs students not in a program.

Member Haber asked if the Professional Development link which was included in the Superintendent's Report could be re-shared. Member Haber had questions about data on the COVID dashboard, which Director Keenan spoke to and explained how the data is compiled.

Member Lavoie asked Superintendent McCall if he will consider filling positions not yet filled, for example Elementary Counselors.

Member Gustafson asked for updated information on where the budget stands since the start of the pandemic.

Member Kirshenbaum asked for clarification about Wednesdays and if teachers are expected to be in school or if they can work remotely.

B. Recommendations Requiring Action by the School Committee

1. To support the Student Opportunity Act Submission, as presented
(R. Imber)
(S. Brown)

Superintendent McCall spoke about the SOA, explaining this process first began a year ago, and was then halted when the pandemic hit. Member Gustafson voiced her opinion of the importance of this plan, which needs to be submitted to the state, and that she does not believe what has been prepared and is up for a vote by the School Committee addresses the intent of use of SOA funds. Superintendent McCall spoke about the process used when writing the plan, which he stated can be modified after initial submission, per DESE. Vice-chair Dennis asked Superintendent McCall to explain how public comment was solicited. Superintendent McCall explained he had reached out to stakeholders in March 2020, seeking comments and input which he did receive, and that the opportunity to provide new input was on the agenda for this meeting, which upon consultation with DESE was approved as a method to solicit stakeholder input. Vice-chair Dennis questioned moving forward with this submission, on such a short turn around and the limited opportunity for public comment/stakeholders input.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Michael Dennis
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Deidre Shapiro
Christina Smith
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland

Opposed:

Maleah Gustafson
Laura Kirshenbaum
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Asima Silva

Abstained:

Megan Weeks
Michael Pantos, Jr.
Jeffrey Sullivan

The motion passed 12-5-3.

2. To award the 2021-2022 heating fuel oil contract to Peterson Oil of Worcester, MA at a firm fixed price of \$1.6999/gallon for one year commencing on July 1, 2021 per the French River Education Center (FREC) collaborative purchasing bid on November 19, 2020.

(K. Mills)

(K. Williamson)

Director Deedy spoke briefly to the motion.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Michael Pantos, Jr.
Deidre Shapiro
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Jeffrey Sullivan
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland

Opposed:

None

The motion passed unanimously.

VII. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business brought before the School Committee.

VIII. Secretary's Report

Chair Weeks explained, for new members and for the viewing public, about approval of the executive session minutes and that the minutes cannot be released until the matter(s) in the minutes are settled.

Vice-chair Dennis explained he has questions or comments about all executive session minutes, expect for the December 21, 2020 minutes; therefore approval of the executive session minutes (with the exception of December 21, 2020) will be held until the executive session minutes can be reviewed, discussed, and approved in an executive session.

A. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District held on August 24, 2020

Deferred

Motion: To extend the meeting until 10:30 PM.

(R. Imber)
(L. Long-Bellil)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Michael Pantos, Jr.
Deidre Shapiro
Christina Smith
Jeffrey Sullivan
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland

Opposed:

Matthew Lavoie
Asima Silva

The motion passed 18-2.

Chair Weeks asked members to hold onto executive session minutes in a safe place for confidentiality purposes.

- B. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on September 14, 2020

Deferred

- C. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on September 29, 2020

Deferred

- D. Approval of the Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on November 9, 2020

Deferred

- E. Approval of the Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on November 17, 2020

Deferred

- F. Approval of the Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on December 7, 2020

Deferred

- G. Approval of #1355 Regular Meeting Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on December 7, 2020

Motion: To approve the regular meeting minutes of the WRSDC held on December 7, 2020.

(K. Mills)

(S. Haber)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills

Karl Ottmar
Michael Pantos, Jr.
Deidre Shapiro
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Jeffrey Sullivan
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland

Opposed:

None

The minutes were unanimously approved.

H. Approval of the #328 Special Meeting Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on December 9, 2020

Vice-chair Dennis had corrections to the minutes, which will be incorporated.
Member Gustafson offered clarifications to the minutes, which will be incorporated into the minutes.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the special meeting of the WRSDC held on December 9, 2020, as amended.

(K. Mills)

(S. Haber)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Benjamin Mitchel
Karl Ottmar
Michael Pantos, Jr.
Deidre Shapiro
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Jeffrey Sullivan
Kelly Williamson

Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:
None

The minutes were unanimously approved

- I. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on December 21, 2020

Motion: To approve the executive session minutes of the WRSDC held on December 21, 2020, not to be released.

(K. Mills)
(S. Haber)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Michael Pantos, Jr.
Deidre Shapiro
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Jeffrey Sullivan
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland

Opposed:
None

Abstained:
Linda Long-Bellil

The minutes were approved 19-0-1, not to be released.

- J. Approval of the #329 Special Meeting Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on December 21, 2020

Motion: To approve the special meeting minutes of the WRSDC held on December 21, 2020.

(K. Mills)
(S. Haber)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Michael Pantos, Jr.
Deidre Shapiro
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Jeffrey Sullivan
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland

Opposed:

None

The minutes were unanimously approved.

IX. Treasurer's Report/Financial Statements

Chair Weeks reminded the Committee that if there were questions regarding the Director of Business and Finance's report that Members should contact the Superintendent; if there were questions regarding the Treasurer's Report, Members should contact the Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair.

X. Committee Reports

A. Management Subcommittee (M. Weeks, Chair, M. Dennis, Vice-chair, S. Brown, K. Mills, A. Silva, C. Smith, A. Young)

Chair Weeks reported the Management Subcommittee will meet on January 20, 2021.

- B. Education Subcommittee (C. Smith, Chair, L. Long-Bellil, Vice-chair, K. Bennett, S. Haber, R. Imber, L. Kirshenbaum, D. Shapiro)

Subcommittee Chair Smith spoke about the meeting of the subcommittee held before this School Committee meeting.

- C. Business/Finance Subcommittee (M. Dennis, Chair, K. Mills, Vice-chair, M. Gustafson, B. Mitchel, K. Ottmar)

Subcommittee Chair Dennis reported on the meeting of December 21, 2020 and that the subcommittee will meet next on January 19, 2021.

- D. Legal Affairs Subcommittee (S. Brown, Chair, K. Ottmar, Vice-chair, R. Imber, K. Mills)

Subcommittee Chair Brown spoke about the meeting of this subcommittee held on January 4, 2021 and he spoke about ongoing negotiations.

- E. Superintendent Goals and Evaluation Subcommittee (K. Mills, Chair, L. Kirshenbaum, K. Williamson, L. Woodland)

Subcommittee Chair Mills reported that Superintendent McCall will provide an update on his goals the week of January 18, for discussion at the January 25, 2021 regular School Committee meeting.

- F. Facilities and Security Subcommittee (A. Young, Chair, K. Bennett, M. Pantos, L. Woodland)

Vice-chair Woodland reported this subcommittee has not met since the last School Committee meeting.

- G. Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism Subcommittee (A. Silva, Chair, L. Woodland, Vice-chair, M. Ayala, K. Bennett, M. Gustafson, J. Haynes, L. Kirshenbaum, L. Long-Bellil)

Subcommittee Chair Silva reported this subcommittee will meet on January 14, 2021.

- H. Audit Advisory Board (B. Mitchel, Chair, A. Young, Vice-chair)

No report was made.

- I. Ad Hoc Subcommittees

- J. Building Committees

- K. School Council Reports:

Central Tree Middle School (M. Lavoie), Chocksett Middle School (K. Williamson), Davis Hill Elementary School (K. Williamson), Dawson Elementary School (L. Kirshenbaum), Glenwood Elementary School (N. Amos), Houghton Elementary School (D. Shapiro), Mayo Elementary School (A. Young), Mountview Middle School (S. Brown), Naquag Elementary School (S. Haber), Paxton Center School (K. Ottmar), Thomas Prince School (A. Silva), Wachusett Regional High School (K. Mills), Early Childhood Center (L. Woodland), Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SEPAC) (M. Gustafson)

Member Gustafson – SEPAC

Member Haber – Naquag Elementary School

Member Brown – Mountview Middle School

XI. Public Hearing

Chair Weeks read what members of the public submitted for Public Hearing (attachment 4):

Dana Sandova, 95 Winthrop Lane, Holden

Philip Gransewicz, 14 Laurel Lane, Princeton

Dana Saradova, 95 Winthrop Lane, Holden

Michaela Becker, 335 Chapel Street, Holden

Michele Van Reet, 230 Charnock Hill Road, Rutland

Aiden Kearney, 111 Mason Road, Holden

Suzanne Lovejoy, 3 Juniper Lane, Holden

Philip Gransewicz, Laurel Lane, Princeton

Nicole Daly, 35 Kilburn Road, Sterling

Kristina Naiman, 21 Michael Drive, Rutland

Ryan McMullin, Princeton

XII. New Business

Chair Weeks asked members to email any items for New Business to her.

XIII. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

(R. Imber)
(K. Mills)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Michael Pantos, Jr.
Eider Shapiro
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Jeffrey Sullivan
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland

Opposed:

None

The motion passed unanimously

The meeting adjourned at 10:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Darryll McCall, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

DM:rlp

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 – Public comments
- Attachment 2 – WRSD COVID Community Task Force PowerPoint
- Attachment 3 – *Transition to Hybrid Planning Update*
- Attachment 4 – Public comments

Eric Greenwell
10 Maple Street
Sterling

Attachment 1

Nothing has improved since the decision was made to remain on full remote learning. As much as I would LOVE to have my daughter back in school, please do not bow to pressure. You have made the correct decisions so far. Please delay opening again, until at least March, to allow the situation to improve.

Yuet Tai

51 Lexington Cir

Holden

Health officials said in the School Committee meeting back in November that hybrid should not begin because of the rise in cases in the 5 towns. Since then, cases have gone way up. If it wasn't safe to start hybrid in November when the numbers were lower, why is it safe to do so now? Also, are there consistent 6ft social distancing within the schools as recommended by the CCD? The November School Committee meeting said that the schools did not have consistent 6ft social distancing in place.

Rachael Catlow
34 Beaman Road
Princeton

The safety of our children, teachers, school staff and administrators is the highest priority. It is not safe for them to be gathering in person when the virus is so rampant in our State. Hybrid learning should be delayed indefinitely. In person learning will only increase the caseload.

Angel Squier
6 Cider Mill Lane
Princeton

[I would like to remain Anonymous] I have concerns about going back to school. Although I am remaining remote, I worry about teachers and peers that will be attending the hybrid plan soon. Some students have already tested positive for COVID-19 and it is very likely that more will test positive especially because of the current spike in cases. I do not think it is safe to go through with the hybrid plan until the vaccine is distributed.

Kristine Baez
109 Autumn Cir
Holden

Why can most of the state offer hybrid learning and Wachusett can't?

Stacia Hemphill

20 Birch Dr

Sterling

Wondering if district is going to take advantage of pool testing that the governor is setting up for public schools. Said first 6 weeks will be free for all school systems. Can participate if your school intends/trying to start up hybrid. I think we should take advantage of at least the initial six weeks for free. Said can use federal money given to school to pay for additional testing after initial six weeks. Says it cost 75% less than individual tests. Can do groups of up to 20 at a time. Believe there will be info emailed to district and a call next Tuesday to go over all the necessary info.

Erin Pickett
361 Chapel St.
Holden

Dear Dr. McCall & SC Members,

One of the main reasons my family, like many others moved to this district was its reputation of having a strong school system. Fast forward almost 18 years, and I'm truly wishing that we chose any of the number of surrounding districts that haven't failed their children this year. A strong school system would not let their students suffer the way we have let ours suffer. Their mental health is crumbling, and their academic needs are not being met in this current model. Dr. McCall's and the School Committee's sole goal right now needs to be getting these kids back into school buildings - not in 4 weeks or 8 weeks but on January 19th. Data has proven minimal COVID transmission is happening in schools, so there is no reason to keep them home any longer. Districts of comparable size have made it work, so we need to do the same - no more excuses.

Thank you,

Erin Pickett

Parent of a 10th grader and 7th grader

Alison Spar
30 Sandy Ridge Road
Sterling

Per Governor Baker's educational announcement today, there should be no question as to the return of the student's of our community to in-person learning on January 19th. As Baker stated, "there is an overwhelming body of scientific research to show that in-person learning can be done without spreading the virus regardless of community transmission rates". Baker mentioned this has been evident in parochial schools, with many located in areas with high transmission rates. Many districts, not including our own, have already been bringing students back into the classrooms. Baker stated unfortunately still too many are either remote or in complicated hybrid programs.

Per Baker "the evidence is clear that in-person learning is "essential" to kids educational, developmental and emotional well-being". Per Secretary Peyser today, medical experts have confirmed that when standard health protocols are followed schools can get back to in-person learning even without universal testing. Commissioner Riley also discussed the option of pool testing that is set to roll out within the next month, however, this is NOT required for in-person learning.

As the representing body of our community, it is the responsibility of the school committee members to advocate for our children. It is time to start holding the administration within this district accountable to safely get our children back to in-person learning as this has gone on far too long. Most of our children, including my own special needs child, are being denied their right to FAPE. They are continuing to fall further and further behind. Please be our voice and advocate for our children. "Transmission occurring in schools is rare" according to a statement made by Commissioner Riley today. Do not let the administration bring in their "so-called" experts in the field to persuade your opinion. As a healthcare provider myself, I questioned the validity of experts being called upon when presenting to the school committee prior to the last anticipated re-opening. After Baker's press conference today, it is evident our children should be returning to in-person learning as expected.

I also ask the members of the committee to please take a closer look at the hybrid program being rolled-out by the administration of the WRSD. As Baker stated in his press conference today schools are also operating complicated hybrid programs. It appears that when children are remote learning as part of the hybrid program, far too much asynchronous work will be provided. How is this considered educating? You can't expect most children, especially of the elementary school level, to carry out work independently without the assistance of a teacher. Some students won't even have the support of a parent. These children deserve more! They deserve to at least receive remote synchronous learning on their at home days. Please ask about the hybrid plans in regards to the amount of asynchronous learning that will occur. Asynchronous learning should not be taking the place of synchronous learning on remote days.

Thank you for your time and for your assistance with advocating for the children of our community.

Sincerely,
Alison Spar

Jennifer Kremer

151 Nola Drive

Holden

Those of us working in Pediatrics are in the majority, in favor of our kids returning back to in-person learning. The benefits of in-person/hybrid learning encompass much more than just academics-access to resources (food, safe adults, etc.), social/emotional learning and structure and security.

Having provided medical care to children and families since the beginning of the pandemic, none of us felt completely prepared for COVID. Nevertheless, our kids need us to follow through with the COVID policies put in place for in classroom learning.

Our community is counting on you to address your reservations and join the rest of the essential workforce and provide the education, resources and support to our children that they so desperately need during these difficult times.

Jennifer Kremer, MSN, CPNP

Sue Stowe
154 Blair Dr
Holden

With numbers rising will students still be starting hybrid 1/19? Also, I have sent multiple emails requesting chromebook assistance for my 2 middle schoolers. In August was told if we had a device to take names off the list to borrow that 1:1 chromebooks will be coming for middle schoolers. In October I emailed that our Chromebooks were not sufficient to support the small amount of online work they were assigned. We have had charter come out, we have sit down restarted everything we can. They are older and slow. Have email the superintendent as well requesting 1:1 chromebooks. I still have not heard back. With the additional classes in the new schedule since November, and assignments they need to do on their chromebooks will we be receiving adequate devices. If not, why can't there be assignments that can be done off screen?

Wendy Sanders
12 Malvern Hill Rd
Sterling

We think the numbers are too high to send kids back. We need to wait until more people are immunized.

Sandra Taubert
8 John Dee Road
Sterling

My 10th grader has been thriving with the fully remote schedule. Starting school an hour later has been a God send as well. If the school goes back to fully onsite this year I feel it would be best to offer a fully remote option for homes like ours where we want to avoid all exposure to the virus and have no issues with learning remote. Thank you.

Karen Valcarce
17 East Park Rd
Sterling

All students and staff should be remote. Infection rates and deaths are high. The new strain could spread like wildfire through a school population. Why are we taking such risks?

Alison Ludden
150 Nola Drive
Holden

I would very much like our children to have the opportunity to go back to school. Research indicates that the likelihood of kids getting Covid in school is very low, especially when guidelines are in place. Research also indicates that kids are struggling in terms of mental health without any in person contact with their peers and teachers. I should know, I have a PhD in education and psychology, my expertise is in adolescent development, and I have taught adolescent health at Holy Cross for 15 years. So many towns have done this successfully and our kids have been deprived of the opportunity to go hybrid. Many of us feel very strongly that we should have the opportunity to do hybrid if we would like. We need stronger leadership, greater advocacy for what is best for kids (not just what is easiest), and more parent input. Keeping kids fully remote increases health and educational inequities. Not all parents have the opportunity to work from home as I do. The longer we stay remote, the greater the disadvantages become. Thank you.

Deanna Homoliski
277 Quinapoxet St
Holden

If we are moving forward with return to Hybrid despite community spread being so high and hospital resources being stretched so thin, will the district be considering the federally funded Pool Testing program Gov. Baker announced this past Friday? With teacher health and safety a big concern until vaccinations are available, this should be something seriously considered by the District to reduce the spread even further.

Kristin Turner
469 Shrewsbury St
Holden

Members of the Wachusett Regional School Committee and District Administration,

As of today, Monday January 11, 2021, our district has had 305 days to prepare to safely get kids into buildings. I ask you today as I have asked before - how many more days are needed to prepare? How many more consultants, meetings, documents, matrices, arguments, motions, amendments, and votes are needed to get our students back to school?

I'd also ask - Are we not in school because of current metrics OR because of lack of preparedness?

Are schools prepared and waiting for students with desks lined up at 6 feet, sanitizing stations set up, distance markers on the floors, bandwidth capacity expanded, professional development completed, adequate technology handed out and set up, and staff with sufficient PPE? Or is there a list of outstanding items that still need to be completed?

If our schools ARE NOT ready, why are high needs students at school in an unsafe and unready environment? Why are sports continuing unhindered? What is on the list that still needs to be completed? How can the community help?

If the schools ARE ready, and we are not at school because of the metrics - why are other schools with similar (or worse) metrics currently at school with little to no in school transmission? Why are we basing our decision on metrics when other districts are instead deciding on a case by case, school by school, in school transmission, assessment? If the metrics are too high why do sports continue unsafely?

It's popular to say that we shouldn't worry about our students falling behind because it's a pandemic after all - but I can tell you as someone who teaches in person every day - our kids ARE falling behind. I leave my house each morning to go teach students who live 20 minutes from here in a district where k-5 students have been back in person since the first week of school. Cases that do come up in schools have few if any close contacts because of the protocol and mitigation procedures that have been put into place. Our elementary schools didn't have extra remote days after winter break - but instead went right back to school - not waiting to see how bad things got - but instead maintaining our strict protocols for keeping everyone safe and prioritizing the very best learning that can be provided.

How can it be so unsafe here and not there? Why can't we do better for our children?

A year ago - we all would have agreed that children shouldn't spend too much (if any) time in front of screens - we're now going on a full year of on screen school now.

Our children deserve better.

Their parents who have quit or lost their jobs, given up on career advancements, or had to hire help to support this district deserve better.

We ARE falling behind.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kristin Turner

Julie Hurley
444 Marshall St
Paxton

As we are approaching the hybrid state date of the 19th this month-which as of today we mark 10 months that the Wachusett School District has not only had no in-person learning but also failed to deliver a plan. I'm sure I speak for many others that the time we've lost is irreplaceable and cannot ever be recovered. I've written to the committee numerous times, I'll remind you I had a Kindergartner and a 2nd grader both whom are not excelling as they should be if they were in person. Let me ask the committee are your children are doing remote learning in this district? Have you moved districts for any of your children? Do they go to private school? What is your vested interest in getting kids back. Sure the numbers have sky rocketed - some of which are your teachers that are a part of those growing #s - you realize that right? I hope you also have done your research that shows children are not spreaders of the virus. A recent article from a family member that is a pediatrician for your reference shared with me - https://www.contemporarypediatrics.com/view/aap-updates-guidance-for-in-school-education?utm_source=sfmc%E2%80%8B&utm_medium=email%E2%80%8B&utm_campaign=01092021_unsponsored_CP_eNL%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B&eKey=dGFyYS5yaWNoYXJkc29uQHVtYXNzbWVtb3JpYWwub3Jn

The children are not thriving in this environment in fact they have anxiety now of the conversation when its mentioned "well you guys will be returning to school soon" and they respond with "I want to stay home!" That is not good. Its not the "new normal"

Get the kids back to school already enough damage done, do the right thing.

Regards
Julie Hurley

William Lahey
166 Bullard Street
Holden

Dear Chair Weeks,
I request that the email below be read in public comments at the regularly scheduled Wachusett Regional School District School Committee meeting on Monday January 11, 2021.

Dear Chair Weeks,

I have made a written request to Dr. McCall per school committee policy P1660 to have an item placed on the agenda for the regularly scheduled Wachusett Regional School District School Committee meeting on January 25, 2021.

The public has had no opportunity to hear any discussion from our elected School Committee representatives about the teachers statement of No Confidence. Members of the school committee have requested that discussion of the statement be added to School Committee agendas. Yet several meetings have happened without this topic being added as an agenda item.

I believe the public deserves transparency from our local elected officials, and I'd like to be able to hear discussion of what concerns teachers have that were serious enough to warrant them to take such a step.

Yours truly,

William F. Lahey, Jr

Melissa Martin
310 Marshall St
Paxton

I am writing to you today in regards to the SOA funds that the School Committee will be voting on. The SOA funds that the district received were targeted for the Special Education area. As I look at the proposal, I see that the funds are geared toward the Social Emotional needs in the district. While that is an important area, we need to apply the funds where they were targeted to go (Special Education). Our special education children have suffered and lost much since this pandemic started. There are many areas in which funds could be applied that directly improve the daily life of our Special Education children. There are staff that could be hired, training in many areas, and direct services or tools. I ask that the Committee not approve the proposed funds and in turn as Administration to review their proposal and gear their funding toward the Special Education children in the district. These children are who the state directed funds to be spent on, and they should be receiving the benefit of those funds.

Thank you

Jeannette n Joe Appel

236 Newell Rd

Holden

Our son is graduating. What is the plan to get kids back to school? Enough is enough. The covid situation has been high n won't change for a while n other districts have been open. We demonstrated horrible leadership n our kids haven't been to school one day since March. This is unacceptable. There is absolutely no evidence that the kids will get covid in school. Holden numbers are up n kids aren't in school. The state will have pool testing. We got a consultant n voted and made a decision n I am sick n tired of the SC n superintendent changing their minds. The superintendent needs to stop bringing in people, so-called experts with opinions that are biased on his side to speak on calls as many of us are exceptionally well read n don't need wrong information. Demonstrate leadership n do your job. The schools need to teach n teach in person. If parents are worried then their kids can stay remote. Its like some parents don't want to send their kids but also don't want anyone else to make our own decisions and send ours. Personally, I saw the plan for seniors. It would be another atrocity if these seniors didn't have a semblance of a senior year given that none of these kids have been in school one day. Sports were played but kids didn't go to school one day!! Where are the priorities? Enough is enough!!!! Get these kids back to school. There will always be a risk a s there will always be a teacher or parent who won't be happy. Do what is right for these kids. Mendon/Upton has been hybrid, Shrewsbury has been hybrid, Northboro has been hybrid. It's an embarrassment n atrocity that Wachusett students haven't gone to school one day. The psychological damage being done to some Wachusett students is on the decisions n poor leadership of our superintendent and inability of our too large SC to make decisions.

Elizabeth Bennett

9 Osgood Ave

Holden

I want to start first by saying thank you for all the members, superintendent and others who have put countless hours into preparing our schools and teachers for the return to school on the 19th. I say this with confidence as you have had over 300 days to prepare for this. Schools should be ready. Our kids are falling behind. They can't sustain this for much longer. The time is now. Schools are open and ours should be open as well. No more excuses!!

Mellyn Shurtleff

107 N Row Rd

Sterling

Which Response Level will we be at, according to the Decision Matrix, on January 19th?

Debbie Jackson

Autumn Circle

Holden

Please be clear on the reasons for schools to be closed. Multiple surrounding towns are hybrid and it is working well. Having a ghost date is misleading and creates hope. If the school is not planning to open due to money/logistics or whatever the reason please be transparent. The transmission rate in schools is clearly not something that is showing to be of a great threat. If we follow proper protocol, what is the challenge?

Gary Hreschuk
126 Jennifer Drive
Holden

Dear Central Office Leadership and School Committee:

I am writing to express my ongoing disappointment with the district administration and the School Committee as it plans its return to in-person learning. I have been observing the ongoing process and discussions since this summer. I agree that our school district's scope does present unique challenges, but these characteristics should not be insurmountable. However, like many, my patience has diminished, and my frustration has increased. As a parent, educator, and community member, I feel that remaining silent and not expressing my concerns would only signal to the School Committee that this course of action is acceptable. However, in a time like this, I am reminded of John F. Kennedy's quote, "There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long-range risks of comfortable inaction." I hope this is a sentiment that rings true for the school committee.

As an educator working in a district 25-minutes away from Holden, I want to share that my district has been in person in a hybrid model since September 29th. Our elementary students have been in person from the outset of the year. The work to prepare for this school over the summer was relentless. However, there was a goal, a vision, and a drive to provide this opportunity for our students. It took the work of a superintendent, the school committee, multiple leadership teams, and ongoing feedback and teachers' contributions to develop this plan. In fact, it was four simultaneous plans that needed to be developed; a remote learning model, a hybrid model, a 100% capacity model, and a stand-alone remote program for those who could not attend in-person learning this year. The goal of the work was to have the ability to shift from one model to the next, based on ongoing health metrics. Admittedly, when we began this process, many of us assumed we would be remote by Halloween. However, we are still in a hybrid model due to safety protocols, cleaning measures, testing, and community commitment. In addition, there are discussions within my school district and many other school districts across the Commonwealth to have students back at 100% this spring. Not to mention, there are school districts currently that are already back at 100% capacity.

I recognize that there are committee members who are currently teaching under a hybrid model in their respective school districts. I have yet to hear their voice about the value of having students in person. I've yet to hear how their school districts have successfully opened their schools at the outset of the year. I wonder if their first-hand experience would push thinking of this school committee? Perhaps, they can add their own experience as educators to help drive policy?

As I sit and watch the school committee meetings, I'm consistently reminded that this body is driven by fear and not facts. I have heard that contact tracing would be extensive and complicated. Yes, it is. When a positive case comes into the school, it is anxiety-provoking, and it consumes a health team's night and weekends, but contact tracing can be done with safety and efficiency. I have heard the concern about staff needing an extended absence because they are a close contact or family member has contracted COVID. Yes, this happens, but the staff circle the wagons for one another, and teachers and administrators become creative and resourceful to take care of the students. Of course, I have heard the concern of in-school transmission. Again, the data across the Commonwealth has been consistent, and the rate of in-school transmission is minimal. If there were high rates of in-school transmission, it would be the district's responsibility to return to the remote model for a prescribed amount of time. This potential shift was a charge that all school districts were required to plan for at the summer's outset. Lastly, for those who feel it is still unsafe to have their children return to the classroom, the district will have a stand-alone remote program to accommodate those students and families. If these are the reasons driving the decision-making, I cannot support this line of thinking and rational because it runs contrary to my own experience and dozens of school districts across the state. Suppose other mitigating factors are driving this current policy. In that case, I implore Superintendent McCall and members of the School Committee to have a level of transparency to support this current plan if our children do not return to school by January 19th.

Although this letter is intended to share my disappointment, I want to publicly thank our teachers and administrators in the district for their continued efforts, creativity, and resourcefulness under the most trying circumstances. I have been nothing short of impressed with their ongoing commitment to our children.

I fear that based on the district's current guidelines that our district is using, at best, our children will return to school just in time for MCAS, and at worse, they will not see the inside of the classroom this school year. I ask that the School Committee approve and finalize the plan to return to in-person instruction under a hybrid by January 19th

Respectfully,
Gary Hreschuk

Jean Gough
Holbrook Lane
Paxton

Dear Dr. McCall and School Committee Members,

Firstly, I want to thank you for all the very difficult work you have done as we weave our way through this extraordinary time. I can certainly appreciate the many tough decisions you have had to make in your guidance and planning.

I need to express my concerns about the schools returning to hybrid instruction next week. I have been in the district a very long time as a music specialist and have seen many ups and downs, but there has really been nothing as serious and deadly as this time has been, as we know. With being an older employee, and in light of the very high Covid numbers in our towns, I am very concerned about returning to the classroom with the very likely possibility of Covid being brought into the school and teachers, staff, and children becoming sick. My getting sick is not my biggest concern, as I have a very compromised husband at home. I am greatly distressed with concern for him and would be absolutely devastated if I did get him sick in this process.

In light of the vaccine being available to teachers very soon, I implore you to hold off on the return to school until we are better protected from this deadly virus and when our towns are no longer in the red. I know I am not the only Wachusett employee feeling very anxious and concerned, and trust you will give our families, teachers and staff more time to stay safe.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jean Gough
WRSD Music Specialist

allison borging
5 arline drive
Rutland
are the kids go to school

Eric Knowlton
235 Mirick Road
Princeton

Parents and families have been left in the lurch on everything related to the return of in person learning since last Summer. Several last minute decisions have been made by the school committee in support of the continuation of all remote learning, despite the fact that there is no data, specifically related to in person learning, to support these decisions. In fact, the opposite is true, where we now have hard evidence to support in-school learning. We now know that it is MUCH safer for kids to be in-school vs. remote. When kids aren't in school, kids, families, and school staff are clearly compensating for it by congregating in other settings to support both social and learning activities (including teachers in our district as evidenced by social media). 80+% of infection occurs in these social settings, not schools!

It's more than disappointing that this district has been unable to pull together a plan to provide at least 2 days of in person learning a week for the more vulnerable younger grade levels. A 5 or 6 year old can not learn comprehensively via Zoom, not to mention the social and emotional skills that are suffering. We are one of the very few school districts throughout the state that have had ZERO in person learning since March 2019, nearly one year ago.

Everyone fully recognizes that these issues are complicated and no one would envy your positions but this is a clear failure of administrative/committee leadership. Because it's hard, doesn't mean we can't find a way to support a better way forward. If the school had to be open to survive, similar to a business, we would most certainly be in a different position today with fully functional in-person models in place, being done so safely. If we're waiting for any and all risk to be removed, we're not living in reality.

Lastly, we can not end up in a position like last Summer where the entire off season appeared to be 'wasted' and we stumbled into the Fall with no comprehensive plan in place. Anyone who cares about our students and learners (vs. political interests) is banking on full, in-person learning by this upcoming September (2021) so please make it your priority that we are ready BEFORE you break for this current school year.

1. "Dr. Christina Hermos, a specialist in pediatric infectious diseases at UMass Memorial Health Care, who believes enough evidence has emerged to suggest students may be better off in school than at home during the pandemic. Key to her and other medical experts' argument is data they say shows schools, despite being indoor spaces that would typically contribute to the spread of the virus, have not been big contributors to the current uptick in COVID-19 cases. "There is good evidence now that having kids in school at least part of the time is safe," she said, adding there are a "lot of health benefits for children" to be in school right now, despite the virus. At UMass, Hermos said she and other pediatricians have seen homebound students develop issues like obesity and poor mental health, which are on top of the learning loss she believes is happening. "You can't expect a 5-year-old to learn on a computer," she said. "You shouldn't."

https://www.telegram.com/story/news/2020/12/28/worcester-students-staff-contracting-virus-outside-schools-despite-hundreds-infections-expects-unsur/4012465001/?fbclid=IwAR33a4B_agR6-V7g0AT_BRz6k0g6HBzflHxQQ65qYW3e_1sP7aV1-Yyelv4

Barry Dellecese
28 Patriot Way
Holden
Members of the WRSD School Committee,

At the time of submitting this public comment we are at 305 days since our kids have been in our schools. The district's plan is for the kids to return to school on January 19th under the details previously shared by the School Administration for hybrid learning.

However, there is a lot of speculation, and probably better worded as expectation, across the community that a motion will be raised for the School Committee to vote on a further delay. I am commenting today to call on you, the School Committee, to keep the plan as-is and not create yet another disruption in our community.

Yes, the community positive case volumes are above the 2.5% metric that Dr. McCall established as the Risk Level 1 measurement. With that metric by itself, we cannot expect a return to school this year for hybrid, never mind full-time, will be feasible this year. You must look at the example countless other schools and districts have set in being able to return to school safely. This includes single towns as well as multi-town districts. This includes districts that have fewer schools, staff and students, and those that are bigger than Wachusett. There are many in this community, including members of this School Committee, who work in other districts that have gone back and have cited that it as being successful.

The data shows schools are low transmission sites when the proper protocols and measures are in place. This is why Governor Baker and the DESE continue to recommend in-school learning despite rising numbers in the community. Of course this is predicated on safe protocols in place and followed by staff and students when in school. I trust with the 305 days we have had, our administration has done everything they can to prepare us. Dr. McCall's recent note indicated they are ready.

I also understand there is no right answer for every family. We all have to make the decision that is best for our situation. For our family, we are desperately hoping our 1st grader and 4th grader can get back into school this year. Please give us the option to do what we know is best for our children.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak publicly on this matter

Barry Dellecese

Kristin Palko
117 Wachusett Street
Holden

The continued remote learning has taken a toll on my elementary age children. We were getting through it up until recently. My 5th grader had become withdrawn and lacks motivation to participate. My 4th grade daughter is experiencing depression and loneliness. We are doing everything possible to support our children but they desperately need to return to the classroom. Continuing remote could be detrimental to my children's mental health and future learning.

Christine Penzone
92 Jamieson Rd
Holden

Even though I know that our numbers are up from previous months, but I still push you to open up schools for hybrid learning. As stated in various studies, COVID transfer in school is incredibly low. For many students, being in schools with mandatory masks, distancing, and disinfecting is safer than being shuffled amongst learning centers or being left to their own devices. I work in a district that has been back hybrid since the end of September; cases have been minimal and only one is linked to possible in school transfer. Most come from activities or decisions that the families make outside of school.

The students are the ones suffering through all of this. The teachers in the district, especially Davis Hill, are going above and beyond to give their students a meaningful experience, but there is a limit to what can be done fully remotely. My daughter's teacher is amazing when working with her students. Being a teacher myself, I am often in awe of how she handles her class of 2nd graders who are all on different paces and just shouting out. However, these students haven't ever met their teacher in person or walked into their classroom. This is a big deal for building the teacher-student relationship for our young learners. I know for many, including my daughter, their love of going to school is really starting to change. In addition to the lose of learning, this desire to even go to school will affect them for years to come.

I would really like to push to vote for opening up our schools for hybrid learning on the 19th. I think that even if it is only possible for some of the students, this is the way we need to be moving. Please help support our students at this time.

Tom Rosoff
67 Prospect St
Rutland

Please allow our children the right to attend school. The lesson we are teaching our children is that when things get tough, we give up and hide. We need to try and make hybrid learning work like the other communities around us have. We are no longer the norm, but more the exception at this point and the people suffering are the kids. Educationally and emotionally they are suffering and it is not fair to them.

Shannon Laptewicz
482 Wachusett Street
Holden

Our daughter is six years old and a first grader at Mayo Elementary in Holden. She is doing well with remote learning, although is beginning to lose interest. I am writing with concern for her social and emotional health. Our daughter is an only child. We try our best to accommodate as many outdoor, socially distant visits and virtual play dates. She speaks with friends/family in different districts and states regularly, all of which have returned to in person learning. She asks a good question - why can they be safe in school, but I can't? Answer me that - WHY? As the months have gone on, her bright spirit, sense of adventure and imaginative play has diminished. She is angry, emotional and has begun talking more and more about NEEDING to return to school as opposed to wanting to return. She recently wrote a letter to her grandparents, who support us with remote learning, stating that she loved them although did not want to see them as often as she had been. She goes on to say that she misses her friends and needs to be back in school with them.

It has been disheartening to listen to recent school committee meetings and listen to an ongoing debate on metrics, remote teaching plans and logistics of transportation. The debate continues within our district as many other schools in our region have successfully returned to hybrid or full time in person learning. Many of those districts have had outbreaks and clusters of COVID cases. This WILL happen. And it WILL be okay. The continuing debate as to whether or not it is SAFE to return to school needs to end. If we're waiting for cases to stabilize, the children of our district will not step foot within our schools during the 20/21 academic school year.

The teachers of our district are doing an amazing job - truly, they are! We owe our children SO much more though!

Mary Shepherd
1320 Wachusett Street
Holden

Dear Chair Weeks, members of the school committee, and residents of the five towns tuning in tonight,

The WREA would like to clarify some of the misleading statements made by Dr. McCall in his response to our letter of no confidence that he made during the meeting held on December 7th 2020.

First, it is worth remembering that the WREA statement of no confidence is not something we arrived at lightly. Our membership voted to condemn district leadership after careful thought and deliberation. It is also worth noting that our statement came after Dr. McCall narrowly escaped a no-confidence censure from the school committee earlier this fall. Currently, there is a statement of no confidence circulating that originated organically from parents in the district. Context matters, and given that the all three of the key stakeholders--the school committee, the teachers, and the parents--felt it necessary to formally undergo the process of crafting a statement of no confidence in the superintendent speaks volumes.

First, Dr. McCall tried to immediately deflect any responsibility for his lack of leadership by stating that many other districts are facing hardship at this time. Though that is undeniably true, many of the comparable districts to our own have not experienced the same levels of dysfunction and lack of transparency as we have seen in our district. For example, Shrewsbury has had a well crafted return-to-school plan in place since early June. On multiple occasions over the summer, WREA met with Dr McCall and the district negotiations team and asked them to consider discussing a reopening plan that addressed the entire district, and not just ESY summer services. This request was rejected. WREA even suggested that WRSD use large parts of other district plans that were well thought out and would be easy to negotiate in a manner that would benefit students, the districts and teachers alike. As members of this committee (and parents) are painfully aware, Dr. McCall did not create a reopening plan that was shared with community stakeholders until September. We would invite viewers to revisit the catalogue of past school committee meetings to see how many times Dr. McCall was asked to be more transparent and share basic information with the committee, only to repeatedly disappoint members who made their displeasure known during these meetings.

Next, Dr. McCall attempted to blame the lack of funding our district receives due to the state funding formula. Though we agree with Dr. McCall entirely that the funding formula is deeply flawed, this is more misdirection. Parents and teachers wanted answers to big questions about what reopening was going to look like. Nothing related to the budget or per-pupil spending was stopping Dr. McCall from adopting large sections of other districts reopening plans to use as a foundation for bargaining. Again, the WREA suggested we do this back in June to avoid having to scramble in the fall. This never happened. In fact, Dr. McCall was absent without reason for three out of seven crucial bargaining sessions we held over the summer.

In addition, Dr. McCall referenced his push to hire a deputy superintendent (chiefly responsible for organizing and developing PD) as an indicator that he is competent. This position was actually the result of a grievance filed by WREA because teachers were worried that the district was not offering a pathway to recertification through mismanagement of PD. It was not the brainchild of Dr. McCall. Additionally, it is worth noting that since the deputy superintendent was hired, PD concerns remain. It may surprise members of the committee to learn that--at the high school--there has only been one district run PD offering during the Wednesday half-days since September. It is January. Even when teachers are informed of PD offerings it has been poorly planned and communicated last minute, usually 18-36 hours before the PD takes place.

Fourth, Superintendent McCall audaciously claimed credit for having "contacted an outside environmental specialist" to examine the health and safety of the HVAC systems in the district schools. This was a demand made by WREA. Dr. McCall had no intention of bringing in any outside specialist to test air exchanges and fought against these measures at the bargaining table. He also fought against specific metrics the WREA proposed that were based on CDC and WHO data that would indicate if the air was unsafe because the HVAC systems are not functioning properly.

Put plainly, the WREA was disturbed by Superintendent McCall's misleading response to our statement of no confidence. We could not, in good conscience, allow his dishonest remarks to continue to mislead the committee and the public at-large.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this corrective rejoinder.

Sincerely,

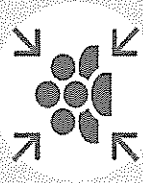
The WREA Executive Board

WRSD COVID Community Task Force

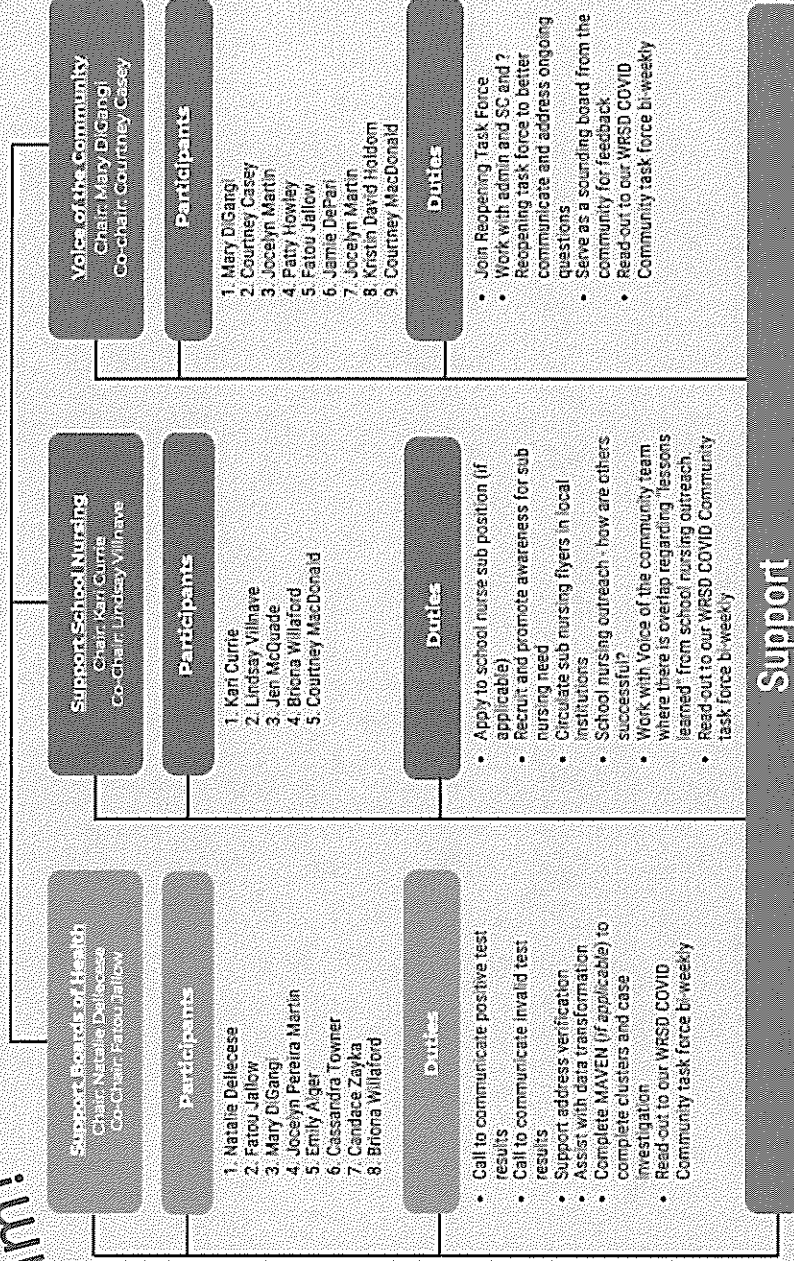
School Committee Readout

as of January 7, 2020

Welcome to the
Team!



WRSD COVID Community Task Force



This group includes 13 "floating" members that attend bi-weekly meetings, spread the word of ongoing efforts, and are able to plug into our existing groups where they are able.

Support Local Boards of Health

- **Communications with Local Boards of Health:**
 - Assistance offered to **all 5 towns** within WRSD
 - **Holden and Paxton** have engaged
 - Paxton has requested Task Force be enabled in MAVEN
 - Task Force is currently onboarding **6 new volunteers** in MAVEN
 - **Rutland, Princeton, and Sterling are currently supported** by Wachusett Medical Reserves.
 - Task Force has requested engagement with the Director of Wachusett Medical Reserves.
- **Current Work Efforts:**
 - Already completed **197 calls** to people that have tested positive or inconclusive for follow up and containment
 - Already assisted with cluster case data transformation for contact tracing

Support School Nursing

- Promoted WRSD School Nurse Substitute flyers in **4 local hospitals, 2 schools of nursing, and 3 private practice facilities**
- Achieved **new applicants**
 - **3 nurses** have already applied/plan to apply from the task force
- Completed outreach to **5 local districts** for “lessons learned”

Voice of the Community



"I think one of the issues I have is the absence reporting variance for schools. They are different between each and no questions asked regarding COVID."
—TPS and WRHS parent

"There are too many emails and videos to watch. I would like it to all be posted to the school website under COVID protocols." — Mayo parent

- Requests to join COVID Reopening Task Force and see meeting resume
- Provide feedback to WRSD School Committee and WRSD Administration
- Determine how to better inform the WRSD community

"I still really don't understand what is the entrance criteria for them to get into the building? What do the numbers have to be (based upon this matrix)? Is there anything left to be done?" — Dawson parent

"I know we are considering only closing affected schools, but is the district also considering shutting down classes for close contacts? Should parents be advised to keep siblings in other schools home too?" — WRHS parent

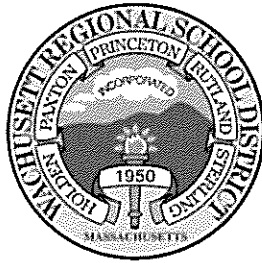


*Where do we go from
here?*

Opportunities for Improvement

We need your help!

- Problem: Disparate, confusing, and/or untimely communication surrounding COVID 19 and return to school criteria
- Potential Solutions:
 1. Increased Visibility to meaningful information – post information to the WRSD website
 2. Larger community feedback - Town Hall / Roundtable / Open Meeting Format for Stakeholders
 3. Additional Support from the WRSD School Committee - 2 liaisons to meet regularly with the Task Force



Transition to Hybrid Planning Update

Report of the Superintendent
January 11, 2021

1

Facilities/PPE

2

Actions

- We have received additional sprayers so each school now will have at least two disinfectant sprayers for use in deep cleaning of classrooms
- We have meters to measure airflow rates and carbon dioxide levels and have begun to train School Admin and Head Custodians on how to measure air change rates (air changes per hour) using the airflow meter.
- Additional personal protective equipment is arriving at all our schools. This order will provide each school with enough PPE to last for 2-4 months of in-person teaching. Additional PPE will be purchased in early March as we determine usage rates.

Transportation

Actions

- Transportation routes have been developed by cohort group
 - Regular yellow bus routes
 - Specialized transportation van routes
 - Cohort groups and bus routes are finalized

Next Steps

- Parent Notification of bus pick up and drop off times - Wednesday

Instruction

Actions

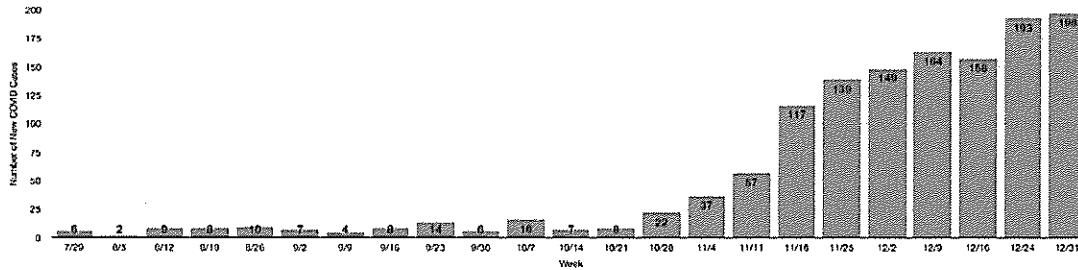
- Central office administration has met individually with each Principal in regard to school readiness
 - Logistics
 - Staffing
 - Resources
 - Professional learning
- Professional development in Blended Learning - Catlin Tucker Online PD course is available for all teachers to take
- January 4th - All Teachers reported back to School buildings
 - Classroom set-up day
 - Instruction is currently being delivered from classrooms

Health & Safety Metrics

Weekly Update COVID-19

Compiled by Department of Family Medicine & Community Health at UMass Medical School

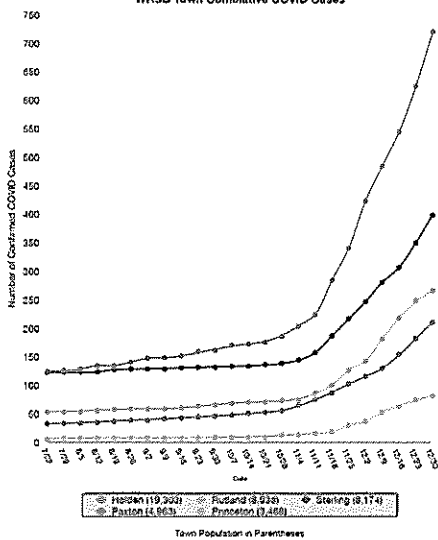
Wachusett Region New COVID Cases Per Week



Includes all 5 towns: Holden, Paxton, Princeton, Rutland, and Sterling

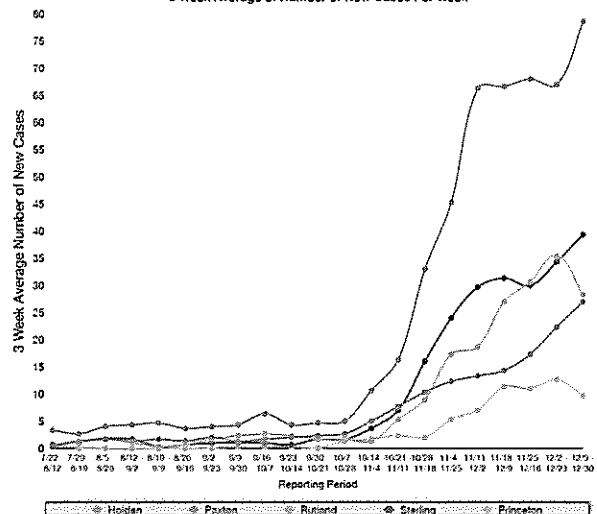
Data extracted from www.mass.gov by the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Massachusetts Medical School

WRSO Town Cumulative COVID Cases



Data extracted from www.mass.gov by the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Massachusetts Medical School

3 Week Average of Number of New Cases Per Week



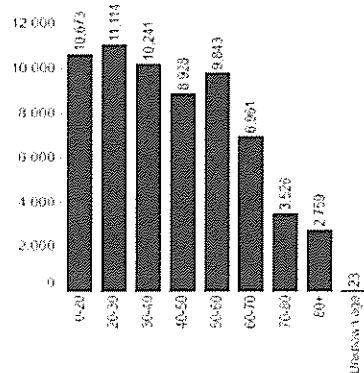
Data extracted from www.mass.gov by the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Massachusetts Medical School

MA COVID Statistics by Age Group

Age groups

Confirmed and probable cases, hospitalizations, and deaths by age group

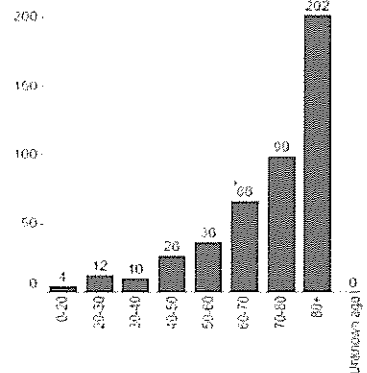
Cases during the last two weeks



Age groups

Confirmed and probable cases, hospitalizations, and deaths by age group

Hospitalized patients during the last two weeks



WRSD Learning Model Decision Matrix: COVID-19 Pandemic

Foreword and Assumptions:

It is assumed that all district schools are adequately prepared for in-person instruction with appropriate health and safety protocols, supplies and planning, as well as having necessary infrastructure readiness in place as per DESE and MA DPH guidelines. It is assumed that a hybrid plan is approved which can nimble pivot to remote learning and back. For return to fully in-person learning, it is assumed that transportation/bussing issues are resolved. It is further assumed that there exist no governmental orders which supersede this plan.

These parameters are intended to serve as guidelines, and it should be understood that given the unprecedented nature of pandemic COVID-19, that adjustments may be warranted as more information and/or resources become available.

MAJOR CRITERIA				
DOMAINS	Risk Level 1	Risk Level 2	Risk Level 3	Risk Level 4
Available Staff Resources	Staffing is typical for pre-pandemic levels	6% of staff members per school are absent due to isolation/quarantine, schools are easily able to backfill, nursing services are available.	8% of staff members per school are absent due to isolation/quarantine, or current absences can be filled with available resources but resources are anticipated to be diminished, nursing services remain available.	Greater than 8% of staff members per school are absent due to isolation/quarantine events, or adequate backfill is no longer possible, or nursing services are not available.
Available PPE/Cleaning & Sanitizing resources	Supply is adequate for the semester, no shortages are anticipated.	At least 3 months supply on hand.	5-8 weeks supply on hand.	2-4 weeks supply on hand.
State/Regional Healthcare Resources	Mostly unaffected but for visitation and pressing procedures, etc. There is no surge capacity in use and elective procedures are able to proceed.	Minimal impact to hospitals. Some surge capacity may be in place and utilized. Staff are redeployed for testing purposes only. There are adequate hospital beds available and hospitals are not using command centers.	Hospitals are using significant surge capacity, but still able to meet needs with available resources. Staff are being redeployed to handle COVID surge. There remains capacity in ICUs and adequate ventilation supplies.	Surge capacity is being utilized, elective procedures have been deferred, staff are being redeployed to handle surge cases. ICU beds and/or ventilation policies are limited. Staffing is dangerously affected by viral spread to staff members.
Presence of Multiple Cases in District Schools (Reference: Massachusetts DESE Guidance)	No confirmed COVID cases among school community members.	If there is more than one confirmed COVID-19 case (students or staff) in the school at one time, or if there is a series of single cases in a short time span, school leaders and the superintendent should work with the local board of health to determine if it is likely that there is transmission happening in school.	When there is suspected in-school transmission beyond one cohort or a small number of cohorts, school and district leaders must consult with the local board of health as to proposed next steps. These steps should include a review of the specific COVID-19 public health metrics for the municipality and could lead to, for example, making a decision to a) close part of the school or the entire school for a short time (e.g. 1-3 days) for an extensive cleaning or other facility mitigation, or b) close the school partially or fully for the longer duration of a 14 day quarantine period.	Should there be circumstances where there are multiple cases in multiple cohorts, school and district leaders must consult with the local board of health as to proposed next steps. These steps should include a review of the specific COVID-19 public health metrics for the municipality and could lead to, for example, making a decision to a) shut down the district for a short time (e.g. 1-3 days) for an extensive cleaning or other facility mitigation, or b) shut down the district for the longer duration of a 14 day quarantine period.
Community positivity rate (calculated for district as a whole, not including higher ed surveillance testing)	0 - 1.5%	1.5% - 2.5%	2.5% - 4.9%	≥ 5%
Response Level Definitions:	Response Level 1 Fully in-person learning except for Cohort C	Response Level 2 Hybrid Learning in place	Response Level 3 All students remote except for Cohort D	Response Level 4 All students fully remote except for those most at risk / in need of in-person instruction

Important Note: The Risk Level assessment (see above) informs a decision about the Response Level. Response Level decisions made by district administration will analyze the Risk Level in the corresponding domains. Response Level decisions may impact a particular classroom, a group of classrooms, an entire school, or the entire school district depending on the prevalence and severity of the current Risk Levels.

Current Status

DOMAIN	RISK LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
Available Staff Resources	2	4% of staff members per school are absent due to isolation/quarantine, schools are easily able to backfill, nursing services are available.
Available PPE/Cleaning & Sanitizing Resources	1	Supply is adequate for the semester, no shortages are anticipated
State/Regional Healthcare Resources	3	Hospitals are using significant surge capacity, but still able to meet needs with available resources. Staff are being redeployed to handle COVID surge. There remains capacity in ICU's and adequate ventilation supplies.
Presence of Multiple Cases in District Schools (Reference: Massachusetts DESE Guidance)	2	If there is more than one confirmed COVID-19 case (students or staff) in the school at one time, or if there is a series of single cases in a short time span, school leaders and the superintendent should work with the local board of health to determine if it is likely that there is transmission happening in school.
Community Positivity Rate (calculated for district as a whole, not including higher ed surveillance testing)	4	≥ 5%
RESPONSE LEVEL	2	Hybrid Learning in place

1/11 Boards of Health Meeting Summary

- Current Cases are remain high in each of the towns
 - Holden 228, Paxton 63, Princeton 21, Rutland 53, Sterling 37
- Positivity Rates %
 - Holden 8.99, Paxton 12.8, Princeton 7.37, Rutland 6.46, Sterling 9.8
- Expressed concern about the rates that have increased during second spike
- Weighing the balance between health & safety and providing the best educational environment and opportunities
- May not know how the transition to hybrid will affect COVID community numbers until we try it
- Stress that students and/or teachers cannot attend school if they are sick

Pooled Testing

- Pooled testing involves mixing several test samples together in a “batch” or “pool” and then testing the pooled sample with a PCR test for detection of SARS-CoV-2.
- This approach increases the number of individuals that can be tested using the same amount of resources as a single PCR test.
- The test is performed at least once per week with anterior nasal swab for all students and staff members. Results are delivered within approximately 24-48 hours.
- If a pooled test result is negative, then all individuals within that pool are presumed negative and may continue to remain in school. If a pooled test result is positive, then all individuals in the pool must quarantine until they are retested individually.
- The Abbott BinaxNOW rapid point-of-care antigen test will be the primary source of this individual follow-up testing.

Pooled Testing - 6 Week Launch

- During an initial 6-week period, participating districts and schools will receive the test kits, support from a testing service provider, and the testing software to track results, all at no cost to them.
- Following the initial 6-week launch, districts and schools may continue using pooled testing by purchasing the tests and any other accompanying testing materials, software, or support from a statewide contract using their federal stimulus dollars.

Dana Sandoval
95 Winthrop Lane
Holden

Attachment 4

I have a Senior , Freshmen, and a 2nd grader. These kids have missed out on enough already, they need interaction with their peers and teachers. I am concerned of the long term impact this will have especially on the younger kids.

Philip Gransewicz

14 Laurel Ln

Princeton

In case you forgot my email...

Please read in the public comment segment at the start of the WRSD SC meeting on Dec. 21, 2020.

December 21, 2020

Dear Wachusett Regional School Committee Members,

I would like to comment on your desire for metrics on which to base the re-opening of our schools in the near future, also known as "NOT EARLIER THAN January 19, 2021".

Where were these metrics in August, 2020? Where were these metrics in September, 2020? Where were these metrics in November, 2020? Of course, you didn't have them because you did not need them. The DEFAULT position of the State of Massachusetts, the Governor, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the CDC is that schools SHOULD BE OPEN for in school learning using the proper safety guidelines. Many other schools in this state, around our country and around the world HAVE BEEN OPEN, yet our district schools remain closed, denying many of our students the education they need and deserve. Everybody looking at the data and science knows that schools and children are NOT a primary source of the transmission of the virus, but that seems to carry no weight with the WRSD SC. So much for following the data and the science.

I get the feeling the insistence on metrics at this stage is not meant to open the schools, but instead to keep the schools closed based on an unattainable metric, and worse, a metric NOT RELATED to our schools. I would like to remind WRSD SC members your responsibility is to our school system, and our childrens' education. You are NOT a regional Board of Health. The only metrics you should be considering are how to manage any COVID cases that might arise within the school system once opened. It is NOT your responsibility to keep our schools closed in order to keep a state wide case count down, especially at the cost of our childrens' education.

Speculation and fear should have no place in this discussion and decision because very real damage is being done to thousands of children in this district by being kept out of school for nearly a year. This damage is NOT being done by the virus. This damage is self inflicted by keeping the schools closed when all of the data, science and experts say they should be open. I once again ask, after 9 months, "What is left to do to open our schools?" If the answer is nothing, then your fiduciary responsibility is to open the schools and manage them, and the virus, the same way all others are doing it.

Best Regards,

Philip Gransewicz

14 Laurel Lane

Princeton, MA 01541

Dana Sandova
95 Winthrop Lane
Holden

I'd like to know what the district plans to do about our Seniors in High School, they are missing out on what should be great times and memories. I want to see a plan on how to handle Graduation, Prom, and other senior activities.

Michaela Becker

335 Chapel St

Holden

Remote has been very difficult and a lot of anxiety. My daughter has been remote and missed so much going from Mountview to WRHS during this time. Her Strong classes from home are ok but if it is a struggling class it is almost impossible. I also have a 10th Grader at Monty Tech that has successfully been hybrid since September with a much more robust hybrid program than you have put forward. 2 half days really? My child has lost so much already. There should be more support for kids that are struggling and having anxiety.

Michele E Van Reet
230 Charnock Hill Rd
Rutland

It's nice that you invited 'Natalie and her nurses' so quickly to present to the School Committee in an open meeting. Could we also get an update on the status of the initial reopening task force the community members volunteered to work on over the summer? Has that task force been disbanded? Why hasn't the original task force been meeting?

Aidan Kearney

111 Mason Rd

Holden

My daughter is a kindergarten student at Davis Hill. She's never stepped foot in her school. She has no friends, as her peers are nothing more than faces on a computer screen for her. Although she's making the best of it she desperately wants to go to school. Watching her do gym class by jumping over a piece of paper in her bedroom is painful to watch as a parent. She has sacrificed enough and done her part, now it's time for her to go to school. We moved here from Worcester specifically for the schools, something we have not experienced yet. This is unacceptable. There are no studies that show schools are high transmission areas. If anything a controlled environment where kids see the same small amount of kids every day is much safer than parents sending kids to learning pods. Enough of the fear-mongering.

Suzanne Lovejoy
3 Juniper Lane
Holden

Dear School Committee members and Superintendent McCall,

Please let me first thank everyone so much for the dedication you have to our school district.

As both a parent of a student at WRHS and an employee of WRSD, I would like to respectfully request that Hybrid Learning be postponed from 1/19/21 if the newly created extensive metrics show that postponement is full-fills the results. These metrics were requested so many times by the school committee and finally developed and presented at the Dec 21st meeting.

At this point, it seems that some well-intentioned commentators now do not want to follow these metrics as determiners for remaining remote. Please do not change the plan that was set in place in December to ensure safety for employees, students, community and beyond. (Overburdened hospitals, for example).

My youngest daughter is a Senior this year and is successfully navigating the Remote Learning Model. She has actually gained skills in many areas with independence and self-advocacy as two examples.

My serious underlying medical conditions make me high risk for severe Covid, which concerns both myself and my doctor, even with the PPE provided by the District. I'm hoping the vaccine arrives sooner rather than later for my older colleagues and those with pre-existing conditions.

Though my plan is to return to the job I love, the recent extreme increase in Corona cases in addition to the close contacts and tracing limitations, as well as unpredictable happenings that cannot be avoided in an elementary school setting, make me question: Why, especially now? As the threat of Covid spread is becoming much more dangerous and vaccines are so near. (Please take into account the new Covid strain, which is much MORE contagious).

As indicated by a recent parent survey, most students are doing well remote learning. Also, I know of some children in other districts who ARE distressed by being in hybrid school with the stringent mask rules and extensive limitations on true social interactions. Unfortunately, social/emotional learning during hybrid is NOT a positive experience for all young students.

I believe that an extension of Hybrid Learning will be our safest path based on current data, if our long-awaited approved Metrics are used and show the indication to remain remote ----- not only for my family, but also for our school community, and the community as a whole.

Respectfully,

Suzanne

Philip Gransewicz

14 Laurel Ln

Princeton

Will younger children (K-2) be exempted from this testing or will there be less intrusive testing methods for younger children? If kids are traumatized by testing, it will be impossible to get them to go to school.

Nicole Daly
35 Kilburn Road
Sterling

Dr. McCall stated at tonight's School Committee meeting that buildings will be deep cleaned on Wednesday afternoons with the disinfecting equipment. As a WRSD teacher, this is contrary to information that I received from Jeff Carlson in a December 30th email response that the disinfecting fogging would NOT be done on Wednesday afternoons. It is ALSO different from the information my principal shared last week about the fogging happening in our building on Monday-Friday evenings.

Kristina Naiman
21 Michael drive
Rutland

Dear members of School Committee and Central Office,

I'd like to politely ask that the district considers sending an email to all district staff and all district families prior to 1/19 outlining the health and safety protocols we all must follow surrounding masks and hygiene. I realize this has been shared in various places, but having the most important aspects for health in safety in one place as a reminder would be important.

Specifically, it would be important to highlight:

1. Hand hygiene surrounding mask wearing (putting on and taking off)
2. Hand hygiene surrounding entering/exiting buildings
3. Hand hygiene surrounding entering/exiting classrooms
4. Sanitization of desks/tables surrounding eating and also switching of students
5. Mask protocols

Thank you for your consideration to highlight some of the most important ways to mitigate COVID spread prior to hybrid opening on 1/19.

Sincerely,
Kristina Naiman

Ryan

McMullin

Princeton

In regards to the pooled testing, will the percentage of each respective school community that consents to testing (and conversely, declining consent) be published to inform the WRSD community so they may assess the impact and validity of interpreting case rate positivity of such testing?